

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

_____This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (canceled).

Claim 2 (Previously Presented): The drive shaft assembly as recited in claim 8, wherein the third inner hub has a central bore that is provided with a plug-in tooth system, which accommodates a journal of the first shaft segment for plug-in centering for integral rotation.

Claim 3 (Previously Presented): The drive shaft assembly as recited in claim 8, wherein the first and second shaft segments of the longitudinal shaft are configured as shaft tubes, and the first, second, and third outer hubs are shaped sheet-metal parts directly connected with the shaft tubes.

Claim 4 (Previously Presented) .The longitudinal shaft as recited in claim 8, wherein the gearbox-side articulation and/or the central articulation are sliding articulations.

Claim 5 (Canceled) .

Claim 6 (Previously Presented): The drive shaft assembly as recited in claim 8, wherein the differential-side articulation is a synchronous articulation.

Claim 7 (Previously Presented: The drive shaft assembly as recited in claim 8, wherein the first shaft segment is a gearbox-side shaft segment and the second shaft segment is a differential-side shaft segment, said first shaft segment having a diameter that deviates from a diameter of the second shaft segment, in such a manner that the two shaft segments of the longitudinal shaft can be pushed onto one another in the manner of a telescope.

Claim 8 (Previously Presented): A drive shaft assembly having a longitudinal shaft for use in an automobile having all-wheel drive or rear-wheel drive comprising:

(a) a gearbox-side articulation comprising a first homokinetic ball joint, said gearbox-side articulation having a first inner hub, a first outer hub at least partly surrounding the first inner hub and a first cage for guiding a first plurality of balls, the first inner hub and the first outer hub having respective first ball raceways wherein the first plurality

of balls is guided in the respective first ball raceways for transmitting a first torque between the first inner hub and the first outer hub;

(b) a differential-side articulation comprising a second homokinetic ball joint, said differential-side articulation having a second inner hub, a second outer hub at least partly surrounding the second inner hub and a second cage for guiding a second plurality of balls, the second inner hub and the second outer hub having respective second ball raceways wherein the second plurality of balls is guided in the respective second ball raceways for transmitting a second torque between the second inner hub and the second outer hub;

(c) a central articulation having a third inner hub, a third outer hub at least partly surrounding the third inner hub at least in some regions and a third cage for guiding a third plurality of balls, the third inner hub and the third outer hub having respective third ball raceways wherein the third plurality of balls is guided in the respective third ball raceways for transmitting a third torque between the third inner hub and the third outer hub; and

(d) first and second shaft segments connected with one another so as to rotate together by way of said central articulation;

wherein a journal of a gearbox output shaft having a plug-in tooth system is directly connected to the first inner hub and a journal of a differential input shaft having a plug-in tooth system is directly connected to the second inner hub, and

wherein each of said first and second inner hubs has a respective central bore provided with a plug-in connection to connect the longitudinal shaft for integral rotation and to center the longitudinal shaft on the journals of the gearbox output shaft and the differential input shaft, respectively.

Claims 9-11 (Canceled).

Claim 12. (New) A drive shaft assembly having a longitudinal shaft for use in an automobile having all-wheel drive or rear-wheel drive comprising:

(a) a gearbox-side articulation comprising a first homokinetic ball joint, said gearbox-side articulation having a first inner hub, a first outer hub at least partly surrounding the first inner hub and a first cage for guiding a first plurality of balls, the first inner hub and the first outer hub having respective first ball raceways wherein the first plurality of balls is guided in the respective first ball raceways for transmitting a first torque between the first inner hub and the first outer hub;

(b) a differential-side articulation comprising a second homokinetic ball joint, said differential-side articulation having a second inner hub, a second outer hub at least partly surrounding the second inner hub and a second cage for guiding a second plurality of balls, the second inner hub and the second outer hub having respective second ball raceways wherein the second plurality of balls is guided in the respective second ball raceways for transmitting a second torque between the second inner hub and the second outer hub;

(c) a central articulation having a third inner hub, a third outer hub at least partly surrounding the third inner hub

at least in some regions and a third cage for guiding a third plurality of balls, the third inner hub and the third outer hub having respective third ball raceways wherein the third plurality of balls is guided in the respective third ball raceways for transmitting a third torque between the third inner hub and the third outer hub; and

(d) first and second shaft segments connected with one another so as to rotate together by way of said central articulation;

wherein a journal of a gearbox output shaft having a plug-in tooth system is directly connected to the first inner hub and a journal of a differential input shaft having a plug-in tooth system is directly connected to the second inner hub, and

wherein each of said first and second inner hubs has a respective central bore provided with a plug-in connection to connect the longitudinal shaft for integral rotation and to center the longitudinal shaft on the journals of the gearbox output shaft and the differential input shaft, respectively and

wherein the gearbox-side articulation and/or the central articulation are sliding articulations and wherein the sliding articulations together have an assembly displacement path, which corresponds to at least a length, with which the gearbox output shaft or the differential input shaft projects into the first or second inner hub in operation.